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A NEW PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology is now completing its third year of existence. It has survived the first shock of the great war; its membership has grown slowly but steadily, and its activities have developed. Some brief account of the aims and work of the Society may be of interest to readers of THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS.

On the occasion of the International Medical Congress in London, during the summer of 1913, the need for unprejudiced and thorough investigation of sexual divergences from average habits and standards was brought forcibly to the notice of a small group of men of letters, and workers for various humanitarian and democratic causes. In the previous year, 1912, the Report of the Royal Commission on the Laws of Separation and Divorce, and the Proceedings of the Eugenic Congress had revealed publicly the need for reorganising the laws and conditions of family life in this country. The Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases was appointed in October, 1913 at the urgent request of leading doctors and largely owing to statements made in the course of the International Medical Congress. However grudgingly and imperfectly, light was being at last let into some of the dark places where life still agonised and decayed, and the initiators of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology felt the need for "more light"; and particularly in the case of members of the specially privileged and responsible medical, legal and educational professions. In all these three professions, in spite of treasures of goodwill and knowledge, experience and devotion, there still exists a tragic ignorance of certain profound and ineradicable human tendencies. And even those persons who see and admit the importance of these tabooed subjects and who help generously in individual cases of hardship, are, too often, unable or unwilling to demand a revision—or, at least, a suspension pending enquiries—of social judgment. It is significant that the President of the Medico-Psychological Society recently admitted in a letter to the *British Medical Journal* that "British medicine has erred in the past in totally ignoring the very considerable influence of the sex instinct."

The founders of the B. S. S. S. P. soon realised that their investigations could not be confined to one type of abnormal

sexuality, but must cover a wide and diverse field of psychology, and must take into consideration the influence of atavistic superstitions, and economic conditions. Among the pioneers and pillars of the Society certain names must receive special mention. The formal institution of the Society, which occurred in April, 1914, and its establishment on a workable basis are very largely due to the prestige and inspiration of Edward Carpenter and the indefatigable activity and versatile talents of Laurence Housman. The position of these two pioneers in the intellectual world, and their close connection with the democratic and feminist movements, have been invaluable assets. Both are still active members of the Executive Committee of the Society and Laurence Housman has contributed largely to its literature. Associated with them in the foundation of the B. S. S. S. P. and also at present members of its Executive, are George Ives, an authority on the reform of our criminal law, and author of that psychological and historical classic "A History of Penal Methods"; and Bertram Lloyd, one of the ablest and most active of the younger Socialists and humanitarians. These four men were certainly the cornerstones of the Society. Other members of the Society now include the chief exponents of the psycho-analytic doctrine in England; the leaders of the birth-control movement and the founder of the movement for Divorce Law Reform; several eminent eugenists and educational specialists; and an increasing number of medical men and women. It is interesting to note that the first medical members of the Society were women.

The Inaugural Meeting of the Society was held on July 8, 1914, at the rooms of The Medical Society in Chandos Street, and with a distinguished magistrate in the Chair. Since then, it has held eleven quarterly meetings, and its membership has nearly trebled. The special difficulties with which the Society has had to contend may be imagined, in the peculiarly strained financial and general conditions of the great war. It has been, and still is, dependent on the generous kindness of individual members for premises to hold its quarterly meetings; and its literary output has been limited to four publications, three of which were delivered as lectures followed by discussions at meetings. Nevertheless it grows and works.

The Society takes the view that "Sex questions are in general of an extraordinarily complex character, and we cannot expect to find a simple solution for them as we can for such questions as

slavery or torture, which can be solved in a simple word: 'suppression.' On the contrary, sexual instinct and sentiment have their deepest roots in life itself. Intimately bound up as it is with the very foundations of humanity, the sexual instinct demands an entirely different treatment." It has been established "for the consideration of problems and questions connected with sexual psychology, from their medical, juridical, and sociological aspects"; and it endeavours to subject these problems to investigation and discussion.

The publications issued, up to the present date by the Society, include the following:

I. "Policy and Principles, and General Aims." (One of the addresses delivered at the Inaugural Meeting; by L. Housman.)

II. "The Social Problem of Sexual Inversion." (A translation, and supplied to members only.)

III. "Sexual Variety and Variability among Women and their Bearing upon Social Reconstruction"; by Stella Browne.

IV. "Fellow-Feeling in Relation to Sex"; by L. Housman.

These publications can only be obtained by adult students of social questions; membership of the Society is confined to persons over twenty-five years of age, who must be proposed and seconded by members who have some personal acquaintance with them.

The Society recognising the vastness of the field of their studies, roughly divides it into the following branches: Inversion, prostitution, aberration, sexual ignorance, disease ("not necessarily venereal"). It has been suggested that study-groups or sub-committees be formed, to collect data, and suggest questions, and pursue investigations on these various topics. It is to be hoped that this scheme will materialise, as a greater degree of specialisation in detail would undoubtedly enhance the value of the Society's work, though the general attitude and point of view should remain broadly human, and free from the distressing dogmatism and absorption in one aspect of their subject, so typical of the scientific pundits.

Meanwhile the Society is arranging a Conference to be held in July, on the "Pros and Cons of Sex Education"; and it is to be hoped that this crucial point will be discussed thoroughly, and more illuminatingly than is generally the case.

We are also collecting and making lists of books bearing on sexual psychology, in English, French and German,—*exclusive of poetry and fiction, at least for the present*. We hope to form a useful bibliography and later a library on the subject.

Finally a few words on the Society's attitude on two points. It is not purely representative of any *one* school of thought or method of research in sexual psychology, nor, in fact of any one point of view on social or economic questions. This is fundamental; the founders and most active members of the Society have been and are keen propagandists on various subjects, but the Society itself exists for *investigation*; and for the advocacy of that attitude of mind, individual and social, which makes investigation possible. In the happy phrase of Laurence Housman: "Here within our Society, we are only social analysts. . . . And if we are to collect the human documents which will be required for supplying the necessary material, and the necessary impulse for sound and expert treatment, to doctors, lawyers, and teachers, we must not ourselves adopt the condemnatory attitude, nor pronounce moral judgments."

The second fundamental principle of the Society is that membership and eligibility for office are open on precisely the same terms to women as to men. On this, I cannot do better than quote E. B. Lloyd: "A steadily increasing number of normally constituted men and women are beginning to understand better, the feelings and emotions of the opposite sex: which understanding is obviously bound to result in a larger measure of sympathy, even if it does not directly proceed from it. That this increasing sympathy, clarity and equality in the relations between the sexes, though still far from widely diffused, is at any rate a consummation devoutly to be wished, most fair-minded people will now be inclined to admit. . . . For although it is probably true that those two vast upheavals of the old social order, the Women's movement, and the Socialist movement—have contributed far more than anything else towards the growing sympathy and intellectual merging of the sexes to-day, yet it is undeniable that free and open discussion of sex questions would be a very potent factor in the same direction. Especially does this apply to the question of sexual inversion; for the intermediates, sundered as they are from both sexes on the psycho-physical side, may yet give very valuable help, as a kind of mediators between them on the intellectual and emotional side." (Article on "Intermediate Sexual Types" in *The New Freewoman: October, 1913.*)

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